AWIN the Arkansas Wireless Information Network

February 2006 AWIN Monthly Newsletter

Welcome...

...to the the monthly newsletter for the Arkansas Wireless Information Network, also known as AWIN. AWIN is a multi-phased approach to building the infrastructure for a statewide interoperable radio system. It will be used by first responders of all types across the state. As we move toward this new level of communication, we will continue to keep you informed of the progress.

AWIN Support

In partnership with the Arkansas State Police, the Department of Information Systems (DIS) operates the AWIN Call Center to support all AWIN subscribers (radio users) with technical assistance or AWIN-related requests. Technicians are on call in the event of any emergency. Call (501) 682-HELP (682-4357) or toll-free (800) 435-7989 or e-mail:

awin.support@arkansas.gov

The DIS professionals who provide support for AWIN have fielded 182 customer requests to date.

AWIN use in Central Arkansas

One of the benefits of the AWIN system is the ability to communicate outside a normal area of assignment. Unfortunately, this benefit can also create radio traffic issues in areas of heavy system use. Such is the case in central Arkansas, as public safety personnel travel through the area and the public safety agencies located in central Arkansas use the system for their day-to-day operations. These issues can converge at times to require a large amount of system resources to be needed at the same time.

The AWIN system registers a radio on the tower with the best signal. As a user travels, the system "hands off" or transfers the radio to the next best tower in the same way your cell phone operates. If a user is monitoring local radio traffic while traveling, the transmission is carried from the point of transmission to the tower registering the communication. One of the available radio channels (typically four are available) at that tower site is used to hear the transmission. AWIN program management needs your assistance in reducing the chances of daily users in the central Arkansas area receiving a "busy" signal.

Units not assigned to Central Arkansas (Pulaski, Lonoke, Saline, and Faulkner counties) should NOT monitor their local channels when in Central Arkansas, but rather monitor Law Com A or MAC Call. MAC Call would be the most ideal, since not all dispatch centers have Law Com A. If contact with a local dispatch or personnel is needed, the user can switch to that channel, communicate, and then return to one of the "monitor" channels.

Your cooperation will help assure efficient system operation for all users, and minimize communication disruptions for those who are dependent on the system for day-to-day operations.

Re-banding efforts

The AWIN system is one of many 800 MHz systems operating in the state of Arkansas. All of those radio systems are preparing for the start of the 800 MHz Band Reconfiguration ordered by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

In recent years, public safety and other "high-site" radio systems have been experiencing increased interference and "dead zones" due to incompatible "low-site" commercial systems operating in the same or adjacent spectrum bands. In order to alleviate interference between these systems, the FCC ordered a reconfiguration of the 800 MHz band, moving public safety licenses to lower frequency segments and commercial cellular networks to higher frequency segments. Also, a "Guard Band" or buffer will be created between the two types of systems.

The Transition Administrator (TA) is an independent entity appointed by the FCC. The TA will oversee the reconfiguration process as it moves across the United States. A Regional Prioritization Plan was developed by the TA which divides the United States into four waves or segments, each with a unique reconfiguration start date.

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Re-banding efforts continued.....

Arkansas is in Wave 2 of the plan with a targeted start date of May 1, 2006 for NPSPAC licenses.

In preparation for the reconfiguration project, the AWIN system has been working to identify all licenses within the system that will need to be relocated. Frequency change has a greater impact than just changing licenses. Equipment has to be identified, reprogrammed and tested to work on the new frequency to the level it did before the change.

AWIN is a large system, and the reconfiguration project will be a large undertaking. With adequate preparation and the proper team in place, the reconfiguration should move smoothly through the state with little or no impact to the system.

AWIN help desk

When AWIN users experience a problem with the radio system, the user is directed to the Department of Information Systems (DIS) help desk for assistance. When the user reaches the help desk, a DIS call center agent will gather information about the problem the user is experiencing. The agent will try to pinpoint the problem, or collect symptoms of the problem from the AWIN user.

After the call center agent compiles information related to the problem, a trouble ticket is open in the DIS HEAT system. The user will be given a ticket number in order to check the status of the work if needed.

The ticket will then be assigned to one of the three AWIN technicians assigned to the AWIN program. At times, the AWIN tech can not complete the work without Motorola's assistance. At that point either the AWIN or Motorola tech will make a site visit to diagnose the problem. The work will be tracked by journal entries on the trouble ticket until the work is completed. Once the problem is resolved, the HEAT ticket will be closed.

DIS Call Center Agent, Ida Fraction

AWIN program management tracks trouble tickets very closely. Program managers receive a weekly automated report of trouble tickets. If there are tickets that have been open with no resolution for a long time period, program management will begin working with technicians or the customer to get the problem resolved. Also, Motorola utilizes tools to monitor the AWIN system. Many times Motorola identifies a problem and makes repairs before users realize there is a problem with the system.

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